CLAIMS

We claim:

1.   A scalable computer system for distributed collaborative computing, the system comprising:

5   a plurality of server computers connected to a plurality of client computers via a global-area computer network;

a high-speed direct connection link connecting the plurality of server computers; and

10   a computer program executable by the server computers, wherein the computer program comprises computer instructions for:

receiving a request to join an on-line conference from a client computer;

15   selecting one of the server computers based on processing loads of the server computers;

establishing a connection between the client computer and the server computer over

20   the global-area network; and

establishing a communication link between the selected server computer and one of the other server computers over a high-speed direct connection link.

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2.   The computer system of claim 1, wherein the computer program further comprises computer instructions for:

sharing an application program executed on

30   one of the client computers on an arbitrary number of other client computers.

3.   The computer system of claim 1, wherein the computer program further comprises computer instructions for:

5   viewing a document stored on one of the client computers on an arbitrary number of other client computers.

4.   The computer system of claim 1, wherein the computer program further comprises computer

10   instructions for:

detecting a failure of one of the server computers handling the on-line conference;

disconnecting the failed server computer from the on-line conference;

15   connecting another of the server computers to the conference; and

resuming the on-line conference.

5.   The computer system of claim 1, further

20   comprising a database, wherein the computer program further comprises computer instructions for:

storing information about the status of the on-line conference in the database.

25   6.   The computer system of claim 1, wherein the computer program further comprises computer instructions for:

ensuring that a maximum number of authorized conference participants in not exceeded.

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7.   A method of operating a distributed collaborative computing system comprising a plurality of server computers, the method comprising:

   receiving a request to join an on-line conference from a client computer;

   selecting one of the server computers based on processing loads of the server computers;

   establishing a connection between the client computer and the server computer over the global-area network; and

   establishing a communication link between the selected server computer and one of the other server computers over a high-speed direct connection link.

8.   The method claim 7, further comprising:

   sharing an application program executed on one of the client computers on an arbitrary number of other client computers.

9.   The method of claim 7, further comprising:

   viewing a document stored on one of the client computers on an arbitrary number of other client computers.

10.   The method of claim 7, further comprising:

   detecting a failure of one of the server computers handling the on-line conference;

   disconnecting the failed server computer from the on-line conference;

   connecting another of the server computers to the conference; and

resuming the on-line conference.

11.   The method of claim 7, wherein the
distributed collaborative computing system further
5   comprises a database and the method further comprises:
        storing information about the status of the
    on-line conference in the database.

12.   The method of claim 7, further comprising:
10   ensuring that a maximum number of authorized
    conference participants in not exceeded.

13.   A computer-readable storage medium storing a
computer program executable by a plurality of server
15   computers, the computer program comprising computer
instructions for:
        receiving a request to join an on-line
    conference from a client computer;
        selecting one of the server computers based
20   on processing loads of the server computers;
        establishing a connection between the client
    computer and the server computer over the global-
    area network; and
        establishing a communication link between the
25   selected server computer and one of the other
    server computers over a high-speed direct
    connection link.

14.   The computer-readable storage medium of claim
30   13, wherein the computer program further comprises
computer instructions for:

sharing an application program executed on
one of the client computers on an arbitrary number
of other client computers.

5   15.   The computer-readable storage medium of claim
13, wherein the computer program further comprises
computer instructions for:
viewing a document stored on one of the
client computers on an arbitrary number of other
10   client computers.

16.   The computer-readable storage medium of claim
13, wherein the computer program further comprises
computer instructions for:
15   detecting a failure of one of the server
computers handling the on-line conference;
disconnecting the failed server computer from
the on-line conference;
connecting another of the server computers to
20   the conference; and
resuming the on-line conference.

17.   The computer-readable storage medium of claim
13, further comprising a database, wherein the computer
25   program further comprises computer instructions for:
storing information about the status of the
on-line conference in the database.

18.   The computer-readable storage medium of claim
30   13, wherein the computer program further comprises
computer instructions for:

ensuring that a maximum number of authorized conference participants in not exceeded.